

Marion's Letters Written – But Not Mailed

On the Days Surrounding the Death of Her Husband, Preston

January – February 1975

On the death of Preston · Crawford, Nebraska

Source: Letters_to_cousins.pdf — seven scanned pages of handwritten correspondence

Submitted by: Melinda Painter

Transcribed: August 2026

Status: Working transcript. Uncertain readings marked with square brackets and a question mark. Original spelling, grammar, and dialect preserved.

Archival Note on the Manuscript

The seven pages are **not** two clean letters. They appear to be a mix of drafts and fair copies:

- **Pages 1–4** — the letter to Cousin Frances, dated January 29, 1975. Page 4 breaks off mid-thought.
- **Page 5** — a **variant or draft page** covering the same ground as pages 3–4 in condensed form, but carrying the closing and signature ("Our love, dear Frances. Marion."), plus a second cemetery diagram with clearer labels.
- **Pages 6–7** — the letter to Cousins Mark and Sally, dated February 3, 1975. This is a **rewrite** of the same account, more polished and more explicit (Marion adds full place names, ages, and relationships she left implicit for Frances). It breaks off after the paragraph of thanksgiving — the remainder is missing.

The Mark and Sally letter reads as though Marion had the Frances letter in front of her. Where the two accounts differ, the February version is generally the corrected one.

Letter One — To Cousin Frances

R.R. 3 Crawford, Nebraska

69339

Jan. 29, 1975

Dear Cousin Frances

Our Heavenly Father called Preston home, Sunday January the twelfth.

Preston had had a paraletic stroke Tuesday, January 7 between 3:30 and 4:00 o'clock. He was taken into Crawford by the Rescue Ambulance to the Memorial Hospital in Crawford at before 5 pm. Ruth Ned and I went with him.

Dan come from Ainsworth late Tuesday.

Wednesday Preston's brother and sister-in-law Mildred came. They brought our son Dick along with them.

Helen and Jim Watson and sons Lester and James Preston (10 months) come from White River S.D. Wednesday

Bob of Newell met the plane at Rapid City bringing in Cathy Dodd and Mary Karn late Wednesday

Dick met Carol's plane at Rapid, from Tacoma, Friday.

So every child was with Preston & me by Friday.

[page 2]

We were with him when he left — except for Bob who had to be back to his ranch at Newell.

Monday, Bob come back after meeting Preston's brother Fred and Alice's plane from Rochester, N.Y. They were all at our ranch before the funeral.

My sister Helen and husband Paul came from Custer to the ranch, Monday.

Helen Peterson, son-in-law Jim Watson and I met our brother Tip's plane from Missoula at the Chadron airport late Monday night.

We were all together in our home at the ranch. Everyone staid over night here and Nedē and Kathleen's, excepting for eight of us.

We were sustained and comforted by each other and by the Lord. We rejoiced in the goodness of Preston we ~~were~~ are grateful for such a father, husband, brother, uncle and grandfather. He will be with us always in our hearts and minds.

Mary's husband Habert [Herbert?] (Buster) Karn and Cathy's husband Richard (a Wells Fargo man) drove all night Monday from Durango — they brought our grandchildren — Cathy's children DeeAnn (19), Natalie (14) & Gregg (13). They stayed in a motel.

[page 3 — Marion restarts this passage]

Mary's husband Herbert (Buster) Karn (a condominium man) and Cathy's husband, Richard Dodd (a Wells Fargo man) drove all night Monday, from Durango to be here Tuesday for the services. They brought our Grandchildren — DeeAnn [17?], Natalie (14) and Gregg (13) Dodd with them. They stayed in a motel that night.

Tuesday night everyone was together again. For beds eight went to the homes of near neighbors.

Bob and Jan and children Heidi (15), Debbie (12) and Nathan (2½) left from the funeral for Newell, S.D.

By Friday everyone had left for home except Carol who is home from Germany — no position as yet here — Jerry her husband was caught in the very last draft so they had two years in southern Germany. Carol had two years of German in college. Now she has a German accent. She worked with German civilians for American Army Europe as a secretary in computer data, I know I have those terms wrong. She & Jerry came home from Europe at Christmas. She helped me file my business papers and helped me with many letters. She was an invaluable comfort. Now she has returned to Jerry, Tacoma and Fort Lewis. Jerry is with administration, too. He will be out in August and they will both go back to school. He as an engineer and Carol a math major.

[page 4]

Carol left last Thursday on a plane (tin goose) [?] to Denver and a jet to Tacoma.

We laid Preston to rest in the Evergreen Cemetery on a mountain top of the Black Hills. There my mother and [her?] husband are, as are brother Bill and wife Doreen. We bought lots between theirs and our own father Christopher's. Helen and Paul have bought lots by Preston's ~~and mine~~.

Cemetery diagram — first version

A hand-drawn plot map with compass points N (top), E (right), S (bottom), W (left). Two clusters of small rectangles are drawn along the west side, each labeled in tiny vertical script. The labels are only partly legible; the second diagram on page 5 is the readable version of the same sketch.

I give you this detailed report because we love you and your dear children and mother (my cousin Pearle) [?]. We know you love and think of us as we do you.

I saw Mark [?] at my brother's home. He was a dear comfort to us when Tip (Sidney) lost his companion and wife Ruth.

[the fair copy breaks off here]

Page 5 — Draft / Variant Page, with Closing

Tuesday, night everyone was together again — Then eight went to different neighbors homes — The rest stayed here. Except Bob and his family left from the funeral for Newell.

Children Heidi (15) — Debbie (12) — Nathan (2½)

By Friday everyone was gone except Carol who staid until Thursday.

I gave you this detailed report because I know you want to know about the family and you enjoyed Preston and he you.

Dick was happy to meet you, too. He enjoyed your interesting home.

Our love, dear Frances.

Marion.

We have two houses — Preston's and mine and Ned's and Kathleen's.

Preston was laid to rest in Hot Springs between the lots of Mom and Ole, Bill and Doreen, and at the head of our father's Christopher's graves. Helen and Paul bought lots next to ours. The Evergreen Cemetery on the mountain top has perpetual care.

Cemetery diagram — second version, more legible

Compass: W at left, S at lower left, E at bottom right.

Top row of plots: Mom | Ole | Bill | Doreen

Second row: Paul | Helen | Preston | Marion

Below, set apart: Chris [Christopher]

Grampa and Grandma Campbell are at rest in Camp Crook by Preston's Parents and Grandparents & uncle. So it was hard for me to decide where to lay Preston & Ned [?] — Camp Crook has no care

[breaks off]

Letter Two — To Cousins Mark and Sally

R.R. 3 Box 17
Crawford, Nebraska
February 3, 1975

Dear Cousins Mark and Sally,

Our Heavenly Father called Preston home, Sunday, January 12, 1975.

Preston had had a paraletic stroke Tuesday, January 7 between 3:30 and 4:00 o'clock. He was taken into Crawford Memorial Hospital by the Rescue Ambulance, before 5 p.m. Ruth, Ned and I went with him.

Dan arrived late that night from Ainsworth, Nebraska.

The next day Preston's brother and sister-in-law Mildred came from Harding County, S.D., bringing our youngest son, Dick with them. Dick has graduated from high school.

Our Helen and husband Jim Watson and sons Lester (3) and James Preston (10 months) arrived late that night from White River where they teach.

Bob of Newell, S.D. met the plane at Rapid City bringing in Cathy Dodd and Mary Karn of Durango, Colorado. They arrived here late that night, too.

[page 7]

Dick met Carol Erickson's plane in Rapid City coming in from Tacoma Washington, Friday.

So every child was with Preston and me by Friday.

We were all with Preston when he departed, except Bob who had had to return to his ranch at Newell.

Monday, Bob came back after meeting Preston's brother Fred and sister-in-law Alice's plane at Rapid City. They live in Rochester, New York.

So the brothers and all of our sons and daughters were here with me for their father's funeral. Preston's two brothers and sisters-in-law were a great comfort to us, too. Of course Preston is theirs as much as ours.

My sister Helen and husband Paul came from Custer to the ranch, Monday.

Helen Peterson, son-in-law Jim Watson, and I met our brother Tip's plane from Missoula, Mont. at the Chadron airport late Monday night.

We were sustained and comforted by each other and by the faith we all have in the Lord. We rejoiced and do rejoice in the goodness of Preston. ~~He~~ We are grateful to God for such a father, husband, brother, uncle and grandfather. He will be always with us in our hearts and minds.

[letter breaks off — remaining pages not present in this scan]

Transcription Notes

Uncertain readings

Page	Reading	Note
2	Habert (Buster) Karn	Almost certainly Herbert — page 3 spells it that way.
2 / 3	DeeAnn's age	Page 2 appears to read 19 ; page 3 appears to read 17 . Marion may have corrected herself. Natalie (14) and Gregg (13) are consistent on both pages.
2	Nedē	Marion writes Ned's name with a terminal flourish that reads like an accent mark.
4	my mother and [her] husband	An insertion is written above the line. Context and the page 5 diagram ("Mom and Ole") indicate her mother's second husband, Ole , distinct from her father Christopher.
4	a plane (tin goose)	The parenthetical is small and cramped. "Tin Goose" was common slang for a Ford Trimotor and, later, for any small feeder aircraft.
4	(my cousin Pearle)	Given name uncertain — could be Pearle, Pearl, or Perle.
4	I saw Mark at my brother's home	If correct, this is the same Mark addressed in the February 3 letter.
5	where to lay Preston & Ned	The second name is unclear.

Editorial conventions used

- Original spellings retained without [sic]: paraletic, staid, come (for came), Grampa.
- Struck-through text reproduces Marion's own cancellations.
- Superscript insertions have been silently lowered into the line where the intent is unambiguous.
- Marion's paragraph breaks are preserved. She indents heavily and starts a new paragraph for nearly every arrival.

Genealogical Observations

A few things the letters establish that may be worth adding to the family record.

On the identity of Frances

Page 5 names "Grampa and Grandma Campbell" resting at Camp Crook — Marion's own grandparents, not Preston's, since Preston's parents and grandparents are named separately in

the same sentence. This supports the family memory that **Frances is a Campbell connection on Marion's side.**

Frances's exact relationship

Page 4 sends love to Frances's "dear children and mother (my cousin Pearle)." If that reading holds, Frances's mother is Marion's cousin — making **Frances a first cousin once removed**, one generation down from Marion. That is a more precise placement than "cousin" alone.

Mark and Sally

Page 4 mentions seeing Mark at Marion's brother's home, and describes him as a comfort when Tip (Sidney) lost his wife Ruth. Mark therefore moves in Marion's **brother's** circle, which again points to the maternal Campbell side rather than the Preston side. Sally is presumably his wife. Dick or Ned may be able to confirm.

The two cemeteries

Marion states her dilemma plainly: the Campbell grandparents and Preston's parents, grandparents, and an uncle all lie at **Camp Crook**, which has no perpetual care. She chose **Evergreen Cemetery at Hot Springs**, on a mountaintop in the Black Hills, which does. The page 5 diagram gives the plot arrangement: Mom and Ole, Bill and Doreen in one row; Paul, Helen, Preston, Marion in the next; Christopher's grave at the head.

Children and spouses recoverable from the letters

- **Bob** — ranches at Newell, S.D.; wife **Jan**; children Heidi (15), Debbie (12), Nathan (2½)
- **Dan** — of Ainsworth, Nebraska
- **Ned** — wife **Kathleen**; second house on the Crawford place
- **Dick** — youngest son, recent high school graduate, came with his uncle from Harding County, S.D.
- **Helen** — husband **Jim Watson**; both teach at White River, S.D.; sons Lester (3) and James Preston (10 months)
- **Cathy Dodd** — husband **Richard Dodd**, Wells Fargo; children DeeAnn, Natalie (14), Gregg (13); Durango, Colorado
- **Mary Karn** — husband **Herbert "Buster" Karn**, in condominiums; Durango, Colorado
- **Carol Erickson** — husband **Jerry**, drafted in the last call, two years in southern Germany; both at Fort Lewis / Tacoma, both returning to school in August, he in engineering, she in mathematics

Preston's siblings

Two brothers appear: one unnamed, married to **Mildred**, from Harding County, S.D.; and **Fred**, married to **Alice**, of Rochester, New York.

Marion's siblings

Sister **Helen**, husband **Paul**, of Custer. Brother **Tip (Sidney)**, of Missoula, Montana, widowed — his wife was **Ruth**. Deceased brother **Bill**, wife **Doreen**. Also mentioned: **Helen Peterson**, who drove with Marion to the Chadron airport.

A dating note

Marion writes on January 29 that Preston died "Sunday January the twelfth." January 12, 1975 was indeed a Sunday, and January 7 a Tuesday. Her dates are internally consistent and check out against the calendar.